

LAKE RUDOLPH

By A. C. HOBY

It was about the end of January when we first sighted Lake Rudolph, and a fine sight it presented, reminding us very much of the sea. The south end of the lake lies in a volcanic basin surrounded by hills and extinct volcanoes, the most striking of all being the Teleki volcano on the southern shore of the lake.

We then commenced our descent to the lake, which we hardly suspected we should have in sight for a whole month, as afterwards turned out to be the case. The country we now had to traverse was the most difficult imaginable, being one mass of volcanic boulders with sharp edges, added to which a severe gale was blowing, making it almost impossible for the porters to hold on to their loads. This wind, though it did not allow us to pitch a single tent on the southern side of the lake, was yet not unwelcome, as the heat otherwise would have been unbearable. The mean temperature as registered by our thermometers was ninety-three, the temperature of the water varying between eighty-two and eighty-four. Not a head of game or a vestige of grass was to be seen here.

On reaching the lake everyone hurried down the tempting sandy beach and plunged into the water. This at first appeared to be quite fresh, but very shortly after drinking we felt our mouths dry up, and found that the after thirst was if anything worse than that before drinking. I have since heard that this water was analysed by Butter's Expedition in 1902, and was found to contain magnesia and some other alkaline substances.

Continuing our march along the eastern shore we noticed that the appearance of the country improved daily, and encountered quite a number of oryx and Grevy's zebra.

About fifty miles up the lake we reached a very fine spring of fresh water flowing into the lake. Here it was that we came on game in considerable quantities, good grass being very plentiful. We stayed here for four days to give our animals a rest and a chance to pick up, and during that time we saw

oryx, Bright's variety of Grant's gazelle, Grevy's zebra, gerenuk, dik dik, &c. Bird life was also very plentiful, and we were able to secure an ample supply of francolin and guinea-fowl and had the best of sport with sand-grouse.

Resuming our journey the next thing we saw of note were two or three small islands about three miles off the shore. Seeing that these were inhabited we fitted up our Berthon collapsible boat and two of us sailed over to one of them. On approaching the island we saw several men coming down to meet us each with a large bunch of grass in their hands. (We had evidently surprised them in the midst of thatching their huts and they were too surprised to lay the grass aside!) These people we afterwards learned called themselves the 'Elmolo' and very much resemble the Samburu in appearance, but by way of ornament wear fish-bones in their ears. Their reception of us was very friendly indeed, involving much handshaking all round, after which we were taken along to their huts. These Elmolo, we learned through the medium of our Masai interpreter, subsist entirely on a fish diet, the results of which are painfully evident in their leprous appearance, rawness of lips, very white hands, and the presence of some deformity or other in most of them. Poor as they seemed as a race, they were not, however, lacking in ingenuity, as evidenced by their cleverly made fishing lines—manufactured from the fibre of the wild banana growing on the shore—their very fine nets, and the rafts fashioned from the trunks of palm trees bound together with grass ropes. We had occasion to test the efficiency of these rafts, for the wind blew up too strong to allow of our sailing the Berthon boat back to the mainland, and we were paddled back by the Elmolo on one of their rafts. Their paddles were very strongly made and were used as punting poles in shallow water.

The Elmolo seemed to live in terror of the Abyssinians, who occasionally raid down these shores of Rudolph. I understand that at one time these people collected quite a useful herd of goats and sheep together and had got so far as to leave their islands and settle on the mainland, but owing to the depredations of the Abyssinians, who from what I could gather used to kidnap them and impress them as guides to the Randili and Samburu kraals, they had to return to their diminutive

islands (averaging only between 5 and 10 acres) and fish-catching. At the best I should think these Elmolo were chiefly made up of former outcasts of the Samburu and Masai. These were the only natives we met with the whole way up the lake.

All the grass on this shore is exceedingly brittle and as sharp as needles, but our caravan, consisting of 6 mules, 60 camels, and 300 sheep, seemed to thrive uncommonly well on it. The whole of Lake Rudolph seems to be full of crocodiles and hippopotamuses, and by way of a treat and change of diet we shot two hippo for the Elmolo.

Having heard before I struck Rudolph that there was an idea that the lions went to the lake to eat cat-fish, I questioned the Elmolo on this point. 'No,' they said, 'the lion does not come for the fish but to eat the crocodiles!' I ridiculed this idea, but they were very decided, and somewhat annoyed at my doubting their word on the point, and I must confess that I afterwards found reason in what they said, for I came on at least four carcasses of crocodiles lying in bushes about 300 yards from the lake shores. I am not sure how far 'crops' generally wander inland, but these carcasses were found in ideal lion lairs, and had evidently been dismembered by some animal, their bones being scattered about the place.

It was about here that we had some splendid fishing, always getting a really good haul every evening. The most common variety was a bream-like fish, though we had one good capture in the shape of a 45-pounder, very much like a cod, but as I have no knowledge of fish I will not venture into details. This fish was speared by one of our boys. The majority of the fish we caught were of the 'eel' species, with long suckers round the mouth; they averaged about 3 feet in length by 8 inches in circumference.¹

We were not sorry to find, as we journeyed farther and farther northward, that the lake appeared to get much less salt (we also noticed that it got shallower), which we attributed to such a large river as the Omo flowing into it from the north. For most of the journey we had to use a roughly contrived condenser (made from a paraffin tin), and this we kept going from the time of arrival in camp until our early morning start, and

¹ Probably Siluroids or Protopterus.

this barely sufficed for our needs. Frequently we had to drink half lake and half condensed water. Our porters, curiously enough, flourished on this water and hardly seemed to notice its brackishness, while, as I think I have said, our stock thrived well on it.

During the rainy season, which I should think is from June until October, the eastern side of Rudolph must be practically impossible for any transport, owing to the huge rivers which come down from the Abyssinian border. Some of these must be 200 yards wide, and judging from the debris, carry at least 10 feet of water. They appear to rise and fall very rapidly, as in every river bed innumerable bones of fish were to be seen which had been suddenly left high and dry as the waters subsided.

The whole of the eastern shores of Lake Rudolph abound with numbers of birds of brilliant and variegated plumage, and would furnish a most interesting study to any ornithologist. Numbers of these birds live on fish. I observed two or three kinds of duck, a very common type having a brown body with a white head. There were also two varieties of snipe, one very much larger than the other, and countless guinea-fowl.

It was interesting to note that on getting as far north as Alia Bay we suddenly came on the Burchell zebra and lost the Grevy's completely. Here also were enormous herds of game of all sorts, including hundreds and hundreds of topi. There were in consequence many lions about, whose roaring could be heard as late as ten in the morning. A little to the north of Alia Bay we came on a large patch of reeds which extended about two miles into the lake. We saw a very fine herd of buffalo here but could not get a shot. The elephant from the country near Lake Stephanie were reported to visit this swamp during the rains. This was about the only spot on Lake Rudolph that we were troubled with mosquitoes.

From this point onwards we traversed some very nice-looking country, and the smoke of very distant grass fires gave us an idea that we should soon come on some human beings. In this we were not disappointed, for we shortly after espied traces of cattle and later fell in with some natives very much resembling the Turkana in many ways, having the

little combination stool and head-rest and their hair in plaits. But they were not nearly of so fine a physique as the Turkana and Korsmojo peoples. They wore brass ornaments in their ears and all carried spears and shields ; we hardly saw a bow and arrow.

These natives proved to be the Reshiat, a tribe very rich in cattle and goats, living right on the north side of the lake. We were evidently expected, for two Reshiat chiefs promptly appeared on the scene and salaamed to us with the most profound respect, practically kissing our boots, one of the many evident signs of how strong a discipline was maintained by the Abyssinians. Most of the people wore a kind of skull cap, which I found out to be the breast of a pelican. This, in addition to being snow-white, was generally adorned with some ostrich feathers and was most picturesque.

Circumstances now necessitated our marching to the Abyssinian post, and here we had to sit tight for some time, eventually marching up the banks of the Omo river, one of the finest rivers we had yet met with, having an average width of 150 yards with a great volume of water. It swarmed with crocodiles, and while watering our sheep we had to constantly fire shots into the water, but even then in one day we lost eight sheep while watering. The River Omo has very steep banks, in some places being 60 feet high, from which many crocodiles can be seen fast asleep on the rocks with their mouths open ! It was not easy to imagine they were asleep, but the natives went one better and said that the birds hopped into their mouths and searched for food there ! The banks of the Omo were a comparative fairyland to the land we had previously travelled through. Here it was that we obtained our first plentiful supply of fresh water for many months. We also found some very fine wild dates, which the porters much enjoyed and we by no means despised. Timber, too, was plentiful and vast herds of topi were constantly in sight. Lions proved both numerous and troublesome round the camp at night.

After following the Omo for five days we struck off in a north-easterly direction for Adis Abeba, marching thence to Jibouti, ultimately catching the French mail to Mombasa after a most interesting six months' trip.